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Artcasting, mobilities, and inventiveness: engaging with new approaches to arts evaluation

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Abstract

Museum and gallery learning has been greatly affected by digital practices and technologies. In particular there is an extended history in the sector of explorations of mobility and engagement. Where museums and galleries use and work with them as powerful objects in their own right, the impact of digital artefacts and their mobilities can be striking. The Artcasting research project explored how a mobilities perspective can provide new insights into, and strategies for, museum and gallery evaluation. The project developed, tested and assessed a new digital and mobile form of evaluation of arts-based engagement in the context of ARTIST ROOMS On Tour in the UK. This chapter explores the challenges and opportunities of approaching evaluation in an exploratory and inventive way, through a lens of mobilities.

Contemporary arts evaluation practice is an often unspoken aspect of community engagement with cultural heritage that requires more, and more creative, attention. The Artcasting project focused on this issue by creating a digital platform through which some assumptions about evaluation could be challenged: that engagement and evaluation are inherently separate; that digital methods can best be deployed by simply making existing practices more efficient; and that there is little room for imaginative or inventive interventions in the evaluation space. Artcasting exposed tensions and issues which were beyond the scope of the project to 'solve', but which generated rich dialogue about intersections of place, movement, engagement, technology, and evaluation. Artcasting is framed here not only as an innovative digital intervention, but as a conceptual object to think and learn with, offering ways of going beyond instrumental uses of technology to solve a specific problem, towards 'inventive problem-making' (Michael 2012).

Introduction: ARTIST ROOMS, communities and technology

In this chapter we argue that contemporary arts evaluation practice is insufficient to the development of generative understandings of community and visitor engagement with cultural heritage. Such engagement is mediated through and supported or blocked by the value that organisations and their funders place on it, and that value is expressed through evaluation practice. This is an often unspoken aspect of community engagement with cultural heritage, and it requires more, and more creative, attention. This is especially important at a time when instrumental approaches to evaluation are pervasive in the sector. This instrumentality significantly affects digital evaluation practice in particular, where visitor logs, tablet based visitor surveys,

automated sentiment analysis and other approaches tend to focus on measurable rather than creative elements of engagement with the arts. We call for more imaginative digital approaches that can simultaneously explore and enrich community and visitor experience. Drawing on our experiences with the Artcasting project in the United Kingdom, we identify a number of challenges for the sector in opening evaluation to these more inventive approaches.

The chapter explores the intersection of arts evaluation, digital technology and mobilities theory in the context of the ARTIST ROOMS collection and touring exhibition programme. ARTIST ROOMS is a collection of more than 1600 works of international contemporary art, jointly owned and managed by Tate & National Galleries of Scotland. ARTIST ROOMS On Tour shares the collection throughout the UK in a programme of exhibitions organised in collaboration with local associate galleries of all sizes. It puts internationally important contemporary artworks in many locations that do not routinely have access to such works and puts the task of making them relevant in the hands of local galleries and users. It particularly aims to ensure the collection engages new, young audiences.

ARTIST ROOMS has long been grappling with how to measure the impact of its touring programme on the groups and communities it seeks to reach. Associate galleries are required to evaluate their projects, and are provided with visitor, participant and associate questionnaires and asked to gather as many completed surveys as possible. Both participant and visitor surveys include a large proportion of questions focused on gathering equalities monitoring information. Other questions ask about prior and new knowledge, motivation, expectations, content of engagement and level of confidence. However, a 2013 evaluation of ARTIST ROOMS found that compliance with evaluation requirements varied considerably between associate galleries (Cairns and Cooper, 2013), suggesting that these surveys may not have been particularly highly valued by the associates, or that completion rates by their visitors and participants may have been low. The evaluation review recommended more robust data capture and inclusion of the unedited voice of young people within the evaluation process (*ibid*).

A 2015 ARTIST ROOMS evaluation goes further, implicating the sector as a whole in a struggle to measure the quality and depth of visitor experience:

In terms of visitor experience I did not find evidence of any measurable shift in the depth of experience – for example there was no comparison of visitor satisfaction levels or visit duration with the ARTIST ROOMS exhibition and other exhibitions. However in my experience the majority of UK art galleries and museums currently struggle to measure quality of visitor experience. (Antrobus 2015, p.20)

In 2015, the Artcasting research project was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council to demonstrate, in the context of ARTIST ROOMS, that digital innovations in arts evaluation are possible and desirable, and to support broader conversations about evidence, value and the arts, drawing on a mobilities-based conceptual framework. The research team from

the University of Edinburgh developed, tested and assessed a new digital and mobile form of evaluation of arts-based engagement – ‘Artcasting’.

This chapter introduces Artcasting, explores issues of instrumentality and criticality in contemporary arts evaluation, and then describes how the Artcasting project has worked to address some of these issues and to better understand how visitors engage with art. It draws from project data, including interviews with cultural heritage staff and funders, to examine the challenges that come with inventive evaluation, and concludes with some recommendations for future research and practice in this domain.

Introducing Artcasting

Artcasting is a mobile application that invites visitors to selected exhibitions to choose an artwork and digitally ‘cast’ it on a trajectory to a new location, adding information about their choice of cast and their associations with the artwork, and potentially re-encountering their own or other artcasts in the future. With an emphasis on movement, trajectory and imagination, Artcasting offers a way of experiencing a gallery exhibition as mobile and open to new interpretations and encounters. This aspect of the project was underpinned by a theoretical focus on mobilities, in which increasing attention has been given to the ways that institutions and communities are produced through movement and transition. For this project, a mobilities perspective encouraged a view of the gallery as *created by* ‘flows and lingerings of the people, objects, and ideas that coalesce to produce gallery exhibitions’ (Knox & Ross 2016). Mobilities thinking provoked questions such as: How are galleries constituted from movement as much as from sedentarism? Where do artworks come from and belong, how do they move to and through the space of the gallery, and where do they go afterwards?

Artcasting was designed to simultaneously help visitors make imaginative connections with artworks, and help galleries and museums understand how people are experiencing and engaging with their exhibitions, both in and beyond the gallery. It was piloted in two ARTIST ROOMS exhibitions in 2015-16: ARTIST ROOMS: Roy Lichtenstein at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, and Robert Mapplethorpe: The Magic in the Muse at the Bowes Museum.

The process of Artcasting involves selecting an artwork, either while engaging with it in the museum or gallery, or after the visit; creating an artcast by choosing where, when and why the artcast is to be sent; and encountering or re-encountering artcasts at other places and times, including the possibility of ‘re-casting’ to another location.

The research questions for the project were:

- How does offering visitors a way to align their impressions of the ROOM with specific places help them articulate their engagement with the work?
- How can a mobilities approach which asks visitors to make connections between art and place constitute meaningful evaluation practice?

From start of the project, these questions and their theoretical underpinnings were been brought up against design tactics and methods in an iterative process. Design elements of Artcasting were supported by theoretical insights generated through discussion, data analysis, and engagement with the literature. For example, informed by ongoing engagement with mobilities theory, Artcasting came to emphasise the movement and trajectory of artworks, in addition to their location. The focus on trajectory foregrounds the particular paths undertaken by cast artworks. The app shows lines tracing the journeys made by each cast artwork, and are dashed to indicate a journey in progress.

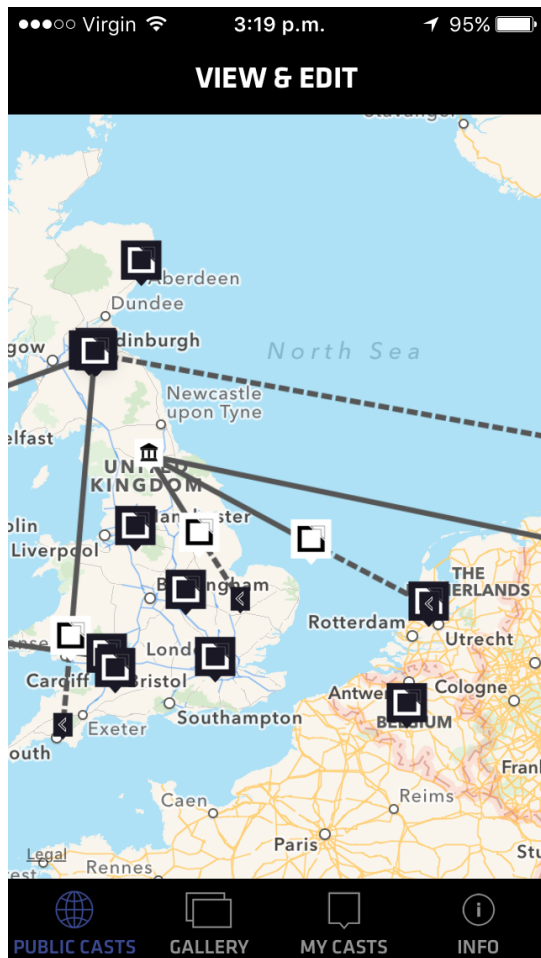


figure 1: lines of trajectory showing artcasts as they move.

In later versions of the app, time and duration became important elements of Artcasting. A shift from location to movement invited the inclusion of duration, and reflected our theoretical interest in the concurrency of space and time. The app provided the means to choose the time of arrival for a cast artwork, and also the speed at which an art work travelled to its destination. This provided a method of casting that foregrounded the journey of the artwork in the process, and encouraged users to think specifically about the movement of the work in the context of spatial and temporal settings and encounters.

The ability to re-encounter artworks in unexpected places was informed by the principle of extending encounters beyond the gallery, via visitors' own devices.

This extension has the potential to begin to generate some of the longitudinal data one interviewee described as ‘the holy grail’ of evaluation (Sowton 2016).

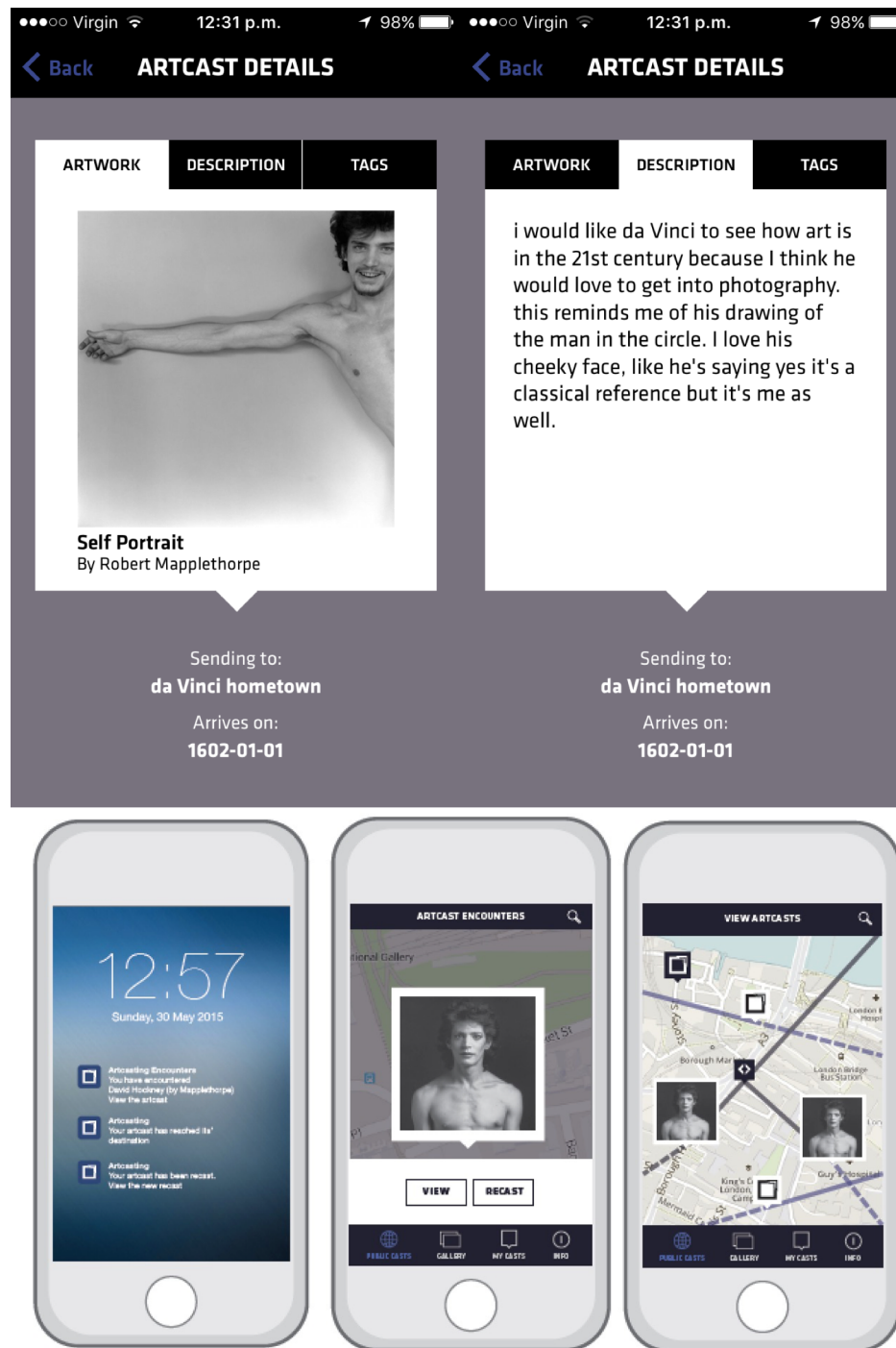


figure 2: an artcast sent to the past (above); encountering artcasts (below)

The Artcasting project was unusual in that, as well as aiming to develop an engaging and appealing digital platform for visitors to use, it maintained a focus on evaluation throughout the development process, and the researchers kept in mind the need to create a platform that would support new insights in this complex area of cultural heritage theory and practice. We investigated how Artcasting could generate unpredictable visitations that might extend well beyond the gallery space or the timeframe of the exhibition, and looked for

ways of capturing the instability of relationships and collaborations of co-production in Artcasting. This was at odds with more established evaluation practices, which:

tend to account for audience experience in a binary fashion: either “in” or “out” of the bounded and sedentary space of the gallery. They are traditionally inclined to privilege “place” as the authentic site of the encounter with art. (Knox & Ross 2016)

We now move on to explore this complexity in the context of the issues that emerge from the literature on arts evaluation.

Issues with arts evaluation

In 2013, ARTIST ROOMS became the first visual arts project to pilot Arts Council England’s Quality Principles for children and young people¹, with a view to using these Principles to inform a new evaluation framework. A 2015 review of the Quality Principles pilot found that the Principles were able to:

inform both the content of [organisations’] evaluation and the way it was applied (for example, by devising creative and engaging methods to capture meaningful feedback from children and young people). Some went further by supporting children and young people to become evaluators themselves. (Sharp & Lee 2015, p.20)

However, the review authors warn that the effectiveness of the Quality Principles is due to the perception on the part of cultural organisations that they are ‘the antithesis of a centrally-defined measurement tool’, and that Arts Council England should not reduce the Principles to a ‘tick box exercise’, lest they ‘encourage a compliance mindset and lip service at the expense of collaborative approaches to innovation and quality’ (ibid).

This tension – between engaging and creative methods for evaluation, and the approaches that tend to accompany mandated and controlled evaluation practices – is a useful way to consider the issue of instrumentality in evaluation.

Instrumental evaluation seeks to judge the impact of the arts in terms of measurable financial benefit, social inclusion, or educational attainment they can be seen to generate. Instrumentality is rooted in understanding causal relationships and taking action based on that knowledge; it is linked to Enlightenment rationality founded on the development of scientific experimentation and explanation; and as a consequence of the scientific logic informing it, it is associated with the use of quantitative measures of impact allowing for the generalisation of findings (Belfiore & Bennett 2010). It is problematic because a focus on causality ignores or silences alternative perspectives of value, excluding the types of measures of cultural value that Donovan (2013) asserts are needed to achieve a holistic approach to valuing cultural activity:

¹ <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/our-priorities-2011-15/children-and-young-people/quality/>

[T]he perception is that governments are only interested in instrumental value and its social and economic impact, and so data collection to inform policy and funding decisions not only overlooks capturing intrinsic value, but the methods employed cannot grasp the essence of subjective experiences. (p.8)

Intrinsic value can involve a concern for the subjective experience of participants. However, a focus on participants' experience raises two issues. Firstly, Donovan (2013) finds that while the cultural sector calls for a holistic approach to understanding cultural value, both economic and narrative approaches to establishing such value are underdeveloped. Secondly, and more importantly, as Belfiore and Bennett assert:

[T]he idea of transformation is so complex that it is impossible to imagine how it might be reduced to a set of measurable attributes. Moreover, even if it were, the number of potential factors effecting the transformation would be so great that it would be impossible to establish with any certainty that experiences of the arts had been the root cause. (2008, p.6)

They focus their exploration of the social impact of the arts on understanding the role, value, function and impact of the arts to society over time and by interrogating the assumptions underpinning the value of the arts to society.

This stands in contrast to an advocacy agenda where the focus lies on finding evidence of the existence of specific impacts. Belfiore and Bennett (2010) identify in this agenda a limit on criticality, when 'the freedom required to ask the types of complex, exploratory and genuinely open-ended questions required for knowledge production' (p.136) is undermined by the need to justify the funding allocated to the arts. In addition, they argue that the advocacy agenda is flawed because so-called evidence-based policy-making is actually closer 'policy-based evidence-making', meaning that evidence of the impact of the arts is unlikely to have impact on the decisions of policy makers.

O'Brien (2010) argues that cultural value must be captured using more than economic measures, which cannot adequately capture the context or meaning of the arts (p.9). Those interested in the future of arts evaluation practice must grapple with the tensions that emerge between demands for particular forms of evidence about effectiveness, and the other forms of value that need to be accounted for. This may include a broader understanding of the values that evaluation processes could recognise. Instrumental approaches cannot easily account for values held by the varied communities cultural heritage sectors work with and for. These values may include beliefs about the intrinsic worth of the arts, or emphasis on particular kinds of participation, for example. Approaches which lack criticality, in turn, will be limited in their ability to challenge assumptions or allow understanding of engagement with and experience of the arts to develop.

Kushner's (2011) call for 'artistry more than technique' (p.311), and greater input from arts-educators in evaluation, reflects Stake's (1967) view concerning the capacity of the arts to help us see and know in different ways

than are typically used within evidence-based evaluation underpinned by an instrumental rationality. The increasing popularity of evaluation approaches incorporating the creative arts might be viewed as a productive challenge to the toolkit mentality of evidence-based evaluation. As Simons and McCormack (2007) put it:

In a climate dominated by the language of targets, outcomes, outputs, and delivery, using the creative arts can generate insight from different ways of knowing and bring us closer to capturing and understanding the evaluation's story. (p.295)

Belfiore and Bennett (2010) propose a humanities-based approach to evaluation, focusing on understanding the complexity of the aesthetic experience. A humanities-based approach explores ideas of value and belief, asking normative questions about the purpose and value of the arts. It may respond to Kushner's call for the inclusion of artistry in the evaluation process. Belfiore and Bennett identify a need for approaches which can "enlighten" both public opinion and decision-making around the role of the arts in contemporary society' (2010, p.139), describing a turn towards:

a critical approach that aims at an open enquiry of the problems, both theoretical and methodological, which are inherent in the project of understanding the response of individuals to the arts and trying to investigate empirically the extent and nature of the effects of the aesthetic experience. (ibid)

Artcasting was positioned in relation to these aims, and developed its methodological approach in response to the need for new ways of getting insight into engagement with art. In the next section, this approach is described as 'speculative', and the implications of working in this way are explored, and put in the context of digital and mobile practices and technologies in the cultural heritage sector.

Digital technology and 'inventive problem-making'

Artcasting explored cultural heritage evaluation in a new way, by building on the specifics of place and space that are so important to the ARTIST ROOMS On Tour experience, taking into account social, spatial and technological mobilities. Museum and gallery learning has been greatly affected by digital practices and technologies. In particular there is an extended history in the sector of explorations of mobility and engagement. Museum educators have sought and valued 'nomadic resources' (Hsi 2003) which can move through gallery spaces with visitors and prompt them to 'experiment further in the real setting rather than providing an escape from that setting' (p.309); and 'seamless visits' which bridge locations and times (ibid). Where museums and galleries use and work with them as powerful objects in their own right, the impact of digital artefacts and their *mobilities* can be striking. The proliferation of 'always-on, always-on-you' (Turkle 2013) mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets hold out the promise of richer in-gallery engagements, and more effective links between home, school, gallery and public space.

In addition to using digital technologies to foster engagement with material spaces and objects, digital *objects* have been theorised as being more open than their material, gallery-based counterparts to being “re-claimed, re-contextualised and re-formed into personally meaningful... configurations” (Bayne, Ross and Williamson, 2009, p.110). The availability of the digital object to be reclaimed produces opportunities for learning and engagement but also introduces tensions for cultural heritage organisations around issues of interpretation, ownership and participation. When digital technologies and digital ways of participating are increasingly a part of everyday life and experiences, these tensions are put into new perspective. For example, the ARtours project at Amsterdam’s Stedelijk Museum explored possible responses to the openness of the digital object, in particular its mobility, which at the time (2009) echoed the mobility of the museum’s collections, which were ‘for years homeless due to a renovation of its original premises and the construction of a new wing’ (Schavemaker et al, 2011). The material collection had been

drifting from one location to another in the city of Amsterdam. The new dialogues this generated with the urban realm, the people in the street and various Amsterdam cultural institutions proved to be very powerful and inspiring. (ibid)

The ARtours project, in response, developed an ‘augmented reality’ lending library of images, which could then be ‘hung’ in an immediate location of the borrower’s choosing and viewed by others through their smartphones. These and other emerging technologies hold promise for engaging with cultural heritage communities, particularly if they are approached in open and inventive ways.

Veletsianos (2010) defined ‘emerging technologies’ for education and learning, as ‘not yet fully understood’ and ‘not yet fully researched, or researched in a mature way’ (p.15). Building on this idea, Collier and Ross (2016) have proposed that the term ‘not-yetness’ can be a useful prompt and support for engaging with risk, complexity and mess in pedagogical settings. These settings can and should include cultural heritage settings, where practices, identities and technologies can benefit from working with complexity and risk in a positive, exploratory and imaginative way – what Biesta (2010) refers to as ‘intelligent problem solving’ rather than an ultimately unproductive and unrealistic focus on ‘what works’.

Michael (2012) urges researchers and practitioners to embrace what he calls ‘inventive problem-making’, and he is not alone in calling for a more open, future-facing, and creative approach to methodology – such calls are being heard across disciplines in the arts, design and social sciences. In their important book on inventive method, Lury and Wakeford (2012) define this as research which is ‘explicitly oriented towards an investigation of the open-endedness of the social world. ... the *happening* of the social world – its ongoingness, relationality, contingency and sensuousness’ (p.2). Speculative approaches involve envisioning *and creating* futures, to provoke new ways of thinking and to bring particular ideas or issues into focus – in the case of Artcasting, issues around arts evaluation. Reporting on the use of speculative

method in their creation of three automated 'Twitter-bots' which would engage twitter users in different kinds of discussions about environmental issues, Wilkie, Michael and Plummer-Fernandez (2014) describe these bots as "methodological interventions that are overtly constitutive of the material that is gathered, but in ways that are open, ambiguous or troublesome. ...the aim is to access new and emergent formulations of the 'issues at stake'" (p.2). This is precisely the way in which Artcasting functioned. By putting mobilities theory up against arts evaluation, and using the development of an app as not simply the expression of research findings but as a *method in its own right*, Artcasting engaged inventively with 'curiosity, critique, doubt, unintended consequences, and emergent properties of technologies in use' (Ross 2016, p.2).

An important element of speculative method as it is practiced in art and design disciplines is its interactive and performative properties (Ross 2016). Inventive methods such as design fictions function through engaging with audiences of different kinds, provoking and creating new futures in the process. Auger (2013) warns that if a design fiction intervention is not attuned to its participants, a 'lack of engagement or connection' (p.12) will result.

Audience was a site of complexity in the Artcasting project – the platform had a triple purpose: to engage visitors in the gallery; to inform galleries about that engagement; and to extend the gallery experience to others no longer (or never) present. The audiences of existing visitors, gallery educators and staff, and potential future users who might encounter artcasts were not necessarily aligned in terms of their needs and expectations, and the value proposition for Artcasting was therefore multifaceted. This served to highlight in a very immediate way tensions around evaluation itself – whose values predominate? Whose needs would be foregrounded, and which audience would Artcasting address itself to?

Before the project was even funded, a large number of people, including ARTIST ROOMS research group members, associate gallery educators, colleagues in the research offices of the University, and the anonymous reviewers who supported the project, had to be persuaded to commit to a speculative vision of what evaluation could be, and the focus was on how Artcasting could constitute an innovative form of evaluation, delivering insights to gallery staff and, by extension, to funders. Once the development of the app began, the focus shifted to the eventual users of the Artcasting app, with workshops and public engagement events that aimed to understand if and how the concept of Artcasting would resonate for visitors. Technological considerations around using geofences and notifications so that app users could re-encounter artcasts raised questions about how users beyond the gallery might best be served by the design of Artcasting. And, as the pilots progressed and data began to flow through the app, reflections on interviews and discussions with partners and others in the sector at conferences and events indicated significant challenges facing the cultural heritage community as it dealt with issues of value, relevance and reach. In designing interactive ways for Artcasting data to be consolidated and analysed, the project had to respond to these challenges, and to the experiences with and assumptions

about evaluation that would strongly influence how data from Artcasting would be received in the galleries.

As a site of inventive problem making, Artcasting was therefore extremely rich. How we addressed the challenges of multiple audiences and purposes, and the implications of this for others exploring new approaches to cultural heritage engagement, is discussed the final section of this chapter.

Reimagining evaluation through Artcasting

'I think when it's something that feels more creative and kind of participatory it doesn't feel like evaluation' (ARTIST ROOMS interviewee)

The Artcasting project took seriously as a starting point Belfiore and Bennett's striking claim:

with the present levels of knowledge around aesthetic reception, it is not possible to make any meaningful broad generalization about how people respond to the arts, and if or how they might be affected by the experience. Even less plausible is the possibility of actually "measuring" any of these aspects. (Belfiore & Bennett 2010, p.126)

Instead of beginning with what was obviously measurable and asking questions designed to elicit that data, we began by asking what approaches could generate new insights into visitors' responses to art in and beyond the space of the gallery. Drawing on the mobilities turn in the social sciences (Sheller & Urry 2006), we considered how we might capture trajectories and networks, memory and imagination, as it related to place, space and movement. With mobilities as a starting point, we were positioned to re-imagine how evaluation might be.

A fictionalised walkthrough of the Artcasting process helps to illuminate the project's contribution to such a re-imagining. Three main people are involved: Anna (a visitor to the Arrow gallery in February); Ryan (a visitor to the Arrow gallery in January); and Marco (head of learning at the Arrow gallery). The Arrow gallery is showing an exhibition of Roy Lichtenstein paintings, and they are using the Artcasting app as a way of understanding how their visitors are engaging with and experiencing the exhibition. In February, Anna visits the gallery with her two children, and they download the app, spending time in the exhibition discussing which artwork they want to cast. Eventually they choose *In the Car*, and they send it to a residential neighbourhood in Hull. Asked to say why they had chosen this place, Anna writes "Grandad loves Pop Art and is just about to move house. He'd be delighted to encounter this icon in his new street!". They send their cast one month into the future, and the Artcasting map shows the trajectory of the cast as it travels through time and space to arrive in Hull. They text Anna's father to invite him to download the app so he can see their artcast in his new street when he moves.

Ryan had visited Arrow in January, and downloaded the Artcasting app then, and he is now home in Hull. One day in April, as he is visiting his friend, a

notification pops up on his phone – Anna’s *In the car* artcast. Ryan opens the artcast and reads the description of why this cast is here. He shows his friend and notes that someone in the neighbourhood is a Pop Art fan. This reminds them of another friend of theirs who has moved to South Africa, and they re-cast Anna’s artcast to where she is living. The map shows the new trajectory, and tells a new story of engagement with this artwork.

Marcus has access to the Artcasting dashboard, which shows all the artcasts that have been sent during the exhibition. He notices that a number of visitors are sending artcasts as a kind of message to someone else who is not with them (like Anna’s father). He selects a group of these and reviews how particular artworks (like *In the Car*) seem to provoke this response more than others. In discussion with colleagues, he starts to develop a new theme for some forthcoming workshops. His colleague is writing a report for one of their funders and includes some of the Artcasting analytics and visualisations to demonstrate the kinds of engagement visitors are having with the exhibition. Marcus gives a presentation to the gallery director and shows some of the artcasts, including Anna’s and Ryan’s, as part of a discussion about how to design their next exhibition.

This story of Artcasting, and Anna, Ryan and Marcus’ experiences with it, demonstrates the various potentials of the platform as a method of engagement and a method of evaluation. At least three spatial and temporal locations are invoked: a gallery visit, a gallery educator’s work space(s), and a future site of encounter with an artcast in the wild. To allow the types of experiences exemplified by Artcasting into the evaluation process offers new possibilities for understanding engagement as mobile, imaginative, digitally mediated, and communicative.

However, the extent to which these possibilities can be realised may be constrained in the sector as a whole, even if they are welcomed in the context of a project like Artcasting with resources, expertise and partnerships in place. Evaluation is understood in particular ways in the cultural heritage sector, influenced by issues of instrumentality and advocacy set out above, and by the demands imposed by organisational structures, policy requirements, and so on. Evaluation is often experienced as a ‘black boxed’ (Williams & Edge 1996) process in which neither practitioners nor agenda-setters feel completely in control of its goals or outcomes.

Some assumptions about evaluation can be challenged by Artcasting: assumptions that engagement and evaluation are inherently separate; that digital methods can best be deployed by simply making existing practices more efficient; and that there is little room for imaginative or inventive interventions in the evaluation space. However, these very assumptions were clearly articulated by participants in scoping interviews at the start of the project. These nine semi-structured interviews with gallery educators, funders and others associated with ARTIST ROOMS, identified a number of expectations about the relationship of engagement, evaluation and the digital that seemed quite inflexible:

I must say our digital kind of engagement with...particularly in terms of evaluation is limited. I suppose the closest we get is conducting our surveys via an iPad so we're populating data straightaway, pushing it and connecting and collecting material. (ARTIST ROOMS interviewee)

The concept of evaluation is seen on its face as relatively 'dry' and bureaucratic, and finding ways in to more engaging approaches is therefore difficult. In particular, evaluation is sometimes understood as irredeemably divided from the understandings of good practice developed in fields of visitor experience and cultural heritage learning and engagement:

on your way out the door, you have this separate kind of prodding from an evaluator who is trying to then get you to digest this for their means and tick boxes. Which as I said, yeah, it sort of goes against a lot of the ideas in a gallery visit and experience. (ARTIST ROOMS interviewee)

Interviewees described both personal and organisational openness to innovation, but when asked about innovative, and specifically digital, approaches to evaluation they were aware of, most found it difficult to think of examples. For instance, social media was mentioned as offering potential routes to new understandings of visitor experience 'perhaps not so rooted in the space [of the gallery]' (interviewee), but social media use for tracking visitor engagement often tended towards the instrumental use of data:

it always ends up being people still talking about the figures which can be quite disappointing. And the massive kind of emphasis that's shifted towards social media in the last few years which is a tool for kind of conversation and discussion. But it still ends up being people talking about the numbers of followers and the numbers of likes and things like this, which doesn't capture any of that at all. (ARTIST ROOMS interviewee)

The lack of capacity to work with digital technologies in ways that captured more or richer data was acknowledged as a serious limitation in moving forward on this front:

there's certainly more creative ways of engaging with digital and evaluation that we would like to explore like a bit more. But I think it's still a capacity issue around that certainly for our organisation, which is: where does responsibility for that lie? Is it in the IT Department, is it in the Communication Department, is in the Creative Team and I think actually it's across all of those. (ARTIST ROOMS interviewee)

With the aim of helping generate more critical and creative approaches, the final stage of Artcasting involved developing a 'dashboard' to help visualise and analyse the data generated by the Artcasting pilot app. Working with colleagues at the University of Plymouth, whose *Qualia* platform has previously been used for data collection and analysis including mood reporting and event feedback², we explored the possibilities for analysing Artcasting data to answer questions such as: What does the intensity of

² <http://qualia.org.uk/system/>

engagement around particular artworks reveal? Which artworks generate the most imaginative responses? Which the most personal? What sorts of memories are triggered by particular artworks, and are there any emerging patterns in terms of associations between artworks and place? Beginning to automate the visualisation of this type of data has demonstrated the richness of such an approach, and future work in this area is planned, so that Artcasting may contribute to a future for evaluation where museums and galleries have access to data which inspires more curiosity and engagement, and can generate creative responses in its own right on the part of visitors and cultural heritage professional communities.

Conclusions

This chapter has offered an exploration of an open, but often hidden, challenge in relation to the relationship between cultural heritage organisations and the communities they work with and serve: the issue of evaluation. Examining Artcasting as a digital ‘object to think with’ offers new insights into the possibilities and limitations of measuring and understanding engagement.

We must be wary of treating digital technology as a ‘quick fix’ solution to thorny social or political issues, and arts evaluation is certainly a complex issue of this kind. Artcasting, as an example of a speculative digital method for addressing the specific circumstances from which the project emerged, has to justify its findings and contributions in terms other than technological novelty or digital innovation. In suggesting that a humanities-inspired approach to evaluation can provide a necessary corrective to an overemphasis on instrumentality and uncritical advocacy, Belfiore and Bennett (2010) do not offer specific recommendations for practice, and any specific examples of practice would be bound to emphasise some futures as desirable while marginalising others. Artcasting can give only a glimpse into possible ways forward for evaluation in the cultural heritage sector, and it has generated its own gaps and silences.

New technological projects are inevitably enmeshed in the contexts and communities they seek to affect and engage. As we have discovered, this can be a strength when such projects can speak back to those contexts in revealing ways. Inventiveness in digital methods offers useful modes through which to extend conversations with our cultural heritage communities about the futures we want to enact.

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